

## AN OVERVIEW OF E-CHOUPAL: THE ICT INITIATIVE OF ITC GROUP

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### ABSTRACT

Today, ICT is playing prominent role in the agriculture sector and also provide largest economic sectors and growth in the world. There are many new initiatives such as Mahindra & Mahindra's Samridhi Centre, DSCI's HariyaliKisan Bazar, Tata's Kisan Sanchar and ITC e-Choupal are playing useful and trustworthy role in agriculture sector and disseminate reliable information among farm community. Out of many initiatives- Choupal is an initiative of ITC Limited. This is Hindi word which means "village meeting place". The meeting place of villager is market where seller/customers come together to do the transactions. In this service farmers can do the transaction facilitated by an internet linked computer directly with a purchaser and can realize better price for their produce good. This service was launched in June 2000, e-Choupal has already become the largest internet based private sector initiatives rural India. e-Choupal service today reach out to more than 40 lakh farmers growing a range of crops soya bean, coffee, wheat, rice, pulses, shrimp in over 40,000 villages through 6500 kiosks across 10 states (Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu). It has future plans to cover 100,000 villages or one sixth of rural India within a decade. e-Choupal tackles the many problems proposed by Indian farmer. The main principle of e-Choupal is to facilitate relevant information, empower and provide complete information for improvement and betterment of Indian farmers.

**KEYWORDS:** ICT, E-Choupal, Overview of E-Choupal, ICT Initiative, ITC Group

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### INTRODUCTION

Indian society is based on agriculture, but today agriculture faces many challenges, making it more and more difficult to achieve its primary needs (Food, Cloth & House). Everybody knows that almost poor people live in rural areas and they have not adequate knowledge towards best and relevant farm practices. They do not have trustworthy and reliable information about agriculture and allied sector. There are so many new initiatives (Mahindra & Mahindra's Samridhi Centre, DSCI's HariyaliKisan Bazar, Tata's Kisan Sanchar, ITC e-Choupal etc) are playing useful and trustworthy role in agriculture sector and disseminate reliable information among farm community (**Sulaiman and van den Ban, 2000**).

Out of many initiatives e- Choupal is an initiative of ITC Limited. This is Hindi word which means "village meeting place". The meeting place of villager is market where seller/customers come together to do the transactions. In this service farmers can do the transaction facilitated by an internet linked computer directly with a purchaser and can realize better price for their produce. This service was launched in June 2000, e-Choupal has already become the largest internet based private sector initiative of rural India.

It is connected directly with rural farmers through internet for procurement of agricultural and aquaculture

products like soya beans, wheat, coffee and prawns. *e-Choupal* tackles the challenges posed by Indian agriculture i.e. low level of knowledge about agricultural practices, weak infrastructure and other challenges related to this service. Because today there is need to up-to-date marketing and agricultural information in rural areas of India. This service is best and provides computers and internet access in rural areas across several agricultural regions of the country, where the farmers can directly know about the sale of their produce with ITC Limited. It is also providing information regarding *onmandi* prices, good & adequate farming practices and about of uses of seeds in the farm field. Findings of **Kalyankar, S. P. and Hamgi, B. S., 2015**) revealed that this service can help farmers to improve the quality of their products and helps in obtaining a better price. The services are provided through this web portal (<http://www.e-Choupal.com>) in different languages.

This service runs by a *sanchalak*, who is trained person because he is fully familiar about the needs of his rural community and also knows the local language of the selected area. *Sanchalak* linked to the internet via phone lines or by a VSAT connection. Each installation serves an average of 600 farmers in the surrounding ten villages within about a 5 km radius. In the other field *samyojak* facilitates good physical infrastructure, monetary work and transportation facilities. *e-Choupal* is one of the innovative initiatives which remit much fruitful agricultural related information to farmer's field such as *mandi* prices and farmer do not pay for this service.

E-market place for spot transactions and support services to futures exchange. There are 6,500 *e-Choupals* e in operation in 40,000 villages in 10 states, affecting around 4 million farmers. ITC plans to scale up *e-Choupals* covering almost all the villages in the country in future (<http://www.e-choupal.com>).

### Coverage Areas of *e-Choupal*

*e-Choupal* services today reach out to more than 40 lakh farmers growing a range of crops: soyabean, Coffee, Wheat, Rice, Pulses, Shrimp in over 40,000 villages through 6500 kiosks across 10 states (Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu). It has future plans to cover 100,000 villages or one sixth of rural India, within a decade (<http://www.e-choupal.com>).

## CONCLUSIONS

ITC's is playing vital role to local farmers by helping transparency, increased information to catalyze rural transformation, enabling farmers to low cost distribution to make the system profitable and sustainable. There are various initiatives of information dissemination to rural areas out of these *e-Choupal* is one of the major information service which is relevant for technology generation and technology dissemination in rural areas. This service also play a major role in creating good market facilities and increasing the efficiency of an agricultural system.

### Scope of the Service

*e-Choupal* is a problem solving service. It can be best for empowerment of rural poor. This service can also provide rural connectivity and e-commerce support through internet. Its methodology is very simple and can be effective for literate as well as illiterate farmers. Through *e-Choupal* latest scientific and new innovation can be researched among farmers immediately. Further, we judge that this service can be useful and fruitful for income generation and empowerment.

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